CAPED CRUSADER

AIDS WALK FOR LIFE ORGANIZER IS OUT TO SHOW YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A SUPERHERO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE PAGE 4

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Mr. Marin comes to London

Ontario ombudsman André Marin makes a presentation in council chambers, Monday, to the strategic priorities and policy committee. Marin fielded questions about how his office handles investigations stemming from alleged Municipal Act violations. ANGELA MULLINS/METRO

Ombudsman. Senior watchdog doles out advice, answers questions during face time with councillors

ANGELA MULLINS
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Investigations by the ombudsman's office "tarnish" politicians' reputations and the banning of legal counsel during questioning is a problem, city councillors told Ontario's senior government watchdog on Monday.

André Marin countered the concerns, saying he and his staff make every attempt to give due process and conduct thorough investigations to determine if complaints about Municipal Act violations are legitimate.

"We need to interview you directly, unfiltered by lawyers," Marin said, noting he doesn't understand why anyone who has done nothing wrong would need a lawyer.

Marin stressed that his office doesn't level charges against anyone or any group. "We're after improving government, improving process," he said.

Marin spoke to the strategic priorities and policy committee after councillors raised concerns about how the ombudsman conducts investigations. The concerns came after Marin launched two reviews of local closed meetings in a matter of six months. Some have said the probes stemmed from complaints by fellow politicians and weren't warranted.

One of the complaints concerned closed-door meetings to discuss the Reservoir Hill development. Ultimately, city officials were cleared of wrongdoing and the meetings were ruled to be in line with exemptions to rules governing open meetings.

Marin addressed the issue on Monday, calling the complaints that prompted the recent inquiries "serious" and "deserving of review."

"The fact I did not find any violations of the law does not mean the complaints lacked merit or the investigations were not justified," he said.

The identity of complainants must be protected, he said, "to ensure others aren't deterred from coming forward in the future."

Marin spent a good portion of the meeting answering questions about how much councillors can "socialize" before problems arise.

The main issue is "optics," he said. "We're not against councillors socializing. Go on out there and party, but don't throw in city business."

Follow Angela Mullins on Twitter @MetroAngela

Proposed raise

No decision on London Hydro pay

A proposed pay hike for London Hydro's board of directors remains on the table, after council's strategic priorities and policy committee took no action on the file on Monday.

The proposal called for a $15,000 increase for the board chair, bringing the annual stipend to $25,000. Others would see their stipends rise to $12,000 from $6,000. Those paid on a per-meeting basis would get $800, up from $600 for each meeting.

The proposal was put forward after a third-party analysis of similar companies across Ontario showed London Hydro's directors were earning less money.

Some councillors said such a large increase isn't feasible given belt-tightening around city hall. But Vinay Sharma, London Hydro's CEO, said bigger paycheques are critical to attracting the most qualified people to the board.

ANGELA MULLINS/METRO

FALL FEST
AIR FUN VILLAGE
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ACTIVITIES
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Mascot theft baffles young soccer squad

Stolen. Vandals snatch top half of shark as the London girls team makes final push in national competition

ANGELA MULLINS
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Missing: Top half of a six-foot, blue wooden shark. Last seen wearing black sunglasses and chained to a sign outside Rona (1305 Commissioners Rd. E.).
Name: BeMO.
Owner: A team of 11- and 12-year-old soccer players, crushed that their mascot has been vandalized.

"There are a few of them that are just quite devastated to think their shark would be (sawed) in half and done away with," said Londoner Tam Mifsud, whose daughter plays on the team.

"It's awful," added Andrea Kanopka, another team mom.

Not to mention ridiculous, Kanopka said.

"Really. It was a six-foot wooden shark. What are you going to do with it?"

Members of the Southend United Sharks U12 Girls team learned of the vandalism Sunday, the day after part of the shark went missing.

Staff at the Rona store where the shark was chained up made BeMO to help the girls campaign for votes and earn the national title in BMO's Team of the Week competition.

Since then, the shark has made numerous appearances at voting booths around town and has been anchored outside the store between events.

BeMO was a perfect face for the campaign and something the girls had become quite attached to, Kanopka and Mifsud said.

He was supposed to be front and centre during a Monday barbecue, serving as a last-ditch effort to garner votes before the contest closed at the end of the day.

With the shark missing — and spirits dampened — the team cancelled the barbecue, players launching a Facebook and email campaign instead to draw in the stragglers.

"The girls are quite disappointed," Kanopka said. "It's just not the way you want to end things, on a sour note."

Members of the Southend United Sharks girls soccer team pose for a photo recently with their mascot, BeMO, outside Rona (1305 Commissioners Rd. E.). The mascot was cut in half and the top part stolen at some point Saturday. CONTRIBUTED

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The contest

- The Southend United Sharks are one of two London teams vying for the national title in BMO's Team of the Week competition. The Nor'West Rebels are also in the mix.
- Finalists were selected for meeting a variety of criteria, including giving back to their communities, team spirit, and their passion for soccer.
- The winner earns a prize package that includes a donation to charity and $125,000 to renovate their soccer field.
- Monday was the voting deadline.

Liberals table bill to force teachers back to work

Tens of thousands of Ontario teachers will likely see their wages frozen and their benefits cut this year as the province's cash-strapped Liberals swung a legislative hammer Monday to battle a $15-billion deficit.

The minority government introduced a controversial bill that would force new contracts on teachers and school workers, as well as give the Liberals the power to ban lockouts and strikes.

It will likely become law, as the Progressive Conservatives have agreed to help pass the legislation.

But the price may be steep for Ontario's self-described "education premier," whose austerity efforts have alienated influential groups whose support — both political and financial — has helped the Liberals hold on to power for nine years.

Dalton McGuinty
THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE

It may cost Premier Dalton McGuinty his shot at a majority government in two potentially game-changing by-elections set for Sept. 6, with the unions channelling their efforts to defeat the Liberals.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, which represents 76,000 teachers, said it's calling on teachers to volunteer in the riding of Kitchener-Waterloo, which was previously held by the Tories.

"Let's be honest, there's no option for us here," said union president Sam Hammond.

"Our members are pointing in the direction they want to go, and our members across this province feel absolutely betrayed by this government based on the work and the partnership that we've had since 2003."

A few hours before the bill was introduced, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation announced it was postponing strike votes that the education minister had used to bolster her argument that job action was imminent. THE CANADIAN PRESS

School zone ahead

- The Liberals want the bill passed before the end of the week, saying it's the only way to ensure labour peace before students head back to the classroom.
- But the unions and the New Democrats insist the school year was never in jeopardy and say the Liberals are creating a crisis in a desperate bid for a majority.

A cut above

Hairstylist to give free trims to kids at shelter

Local hairstylist Karen Paradis will be giving haircuts to homeless children living at Rotholme Women's and Family Shelter.

On Wednesday at 2 p.m., Paradis will be at the shelter at 42 Stanley St. offering haircuts to the young residents.

Rotholme Women's & Family Shelter is a branch of Mission Services of London that has been providing housing to two-parent and single-parent families. It is a 41-bed facility. METRO

On the web

Do you like to cuddle? This woman does. Scan the code to watch one lady's sleepy snuggle session that shocked a fellow commuter.

Fearless fundraising: Walk for Life organizer promises to don a cape

Costumed crusader. If she reaches her pledge goal of $5,000, Natasha Newby will wear superhero outfits around town for 10 days

ANGELA MULLINS
angela.mullins@metronews.ca

Natasha Newby, organizer of the AIDS Walk for Life and fund development co-ordinator at the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, strikes her best Wonder Woman pose Monday at the AIDS Connection. Newby promises to break out her superhero gear and hit the streets if she gets enough pledges in advance of the Sept. 15 Walk for Life. ANGELA MULLINS/METRO

Go ahead. Ask Natasha Newby why she's prepared to parade around London dressed like Wonder Woman — or Batman, or Thor, or Captain America.

"I'm hoping it will create some chatter," said Newby, who is the fund development co-ordinator at the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC). "I want people to stop and ask so I can tell them what we do, and why it's so important."

Before she dons her superhero duds, Newby is asking the community to do its part.

The pitch? If she receives a total of $5,000 in pledges to support her in the AIDS Walk for Life, she will wear a costume for each of the 10 days leading up to the Sept. 15 event at Springbank Gardens.

And she won't keep her fancy flare contained to the privacy of her home or office. Newby is promising an all-out assault in super hero attire, complete with trips to the grocery store and visits to Western Fair with her son.

While the tone of Newby's challenge may be lighthearted, the Walk for Life is a chance to turn the spotlight on HIV/AIDS and local non-profits that work with patients.

The walk, which Newby is coordinating, will mark its 22nd year next month, aiming to raise a combined $40,000 for the John Gordon Home AIDS hospice, RHAC and Camp Wendake, which serves as a getaway for people living with HIV.

This year's Walk for Life will be in the evening. Participants will carry lanterns to help make the event a sort of vigil for those who have lost their battle with AIDS and a celebration of those whose fight continues.

Superheroes and legendary-comic-book characters are fitting mascots for the event, Newby said, because clients and staff at the non-profits are "everyday heroes."

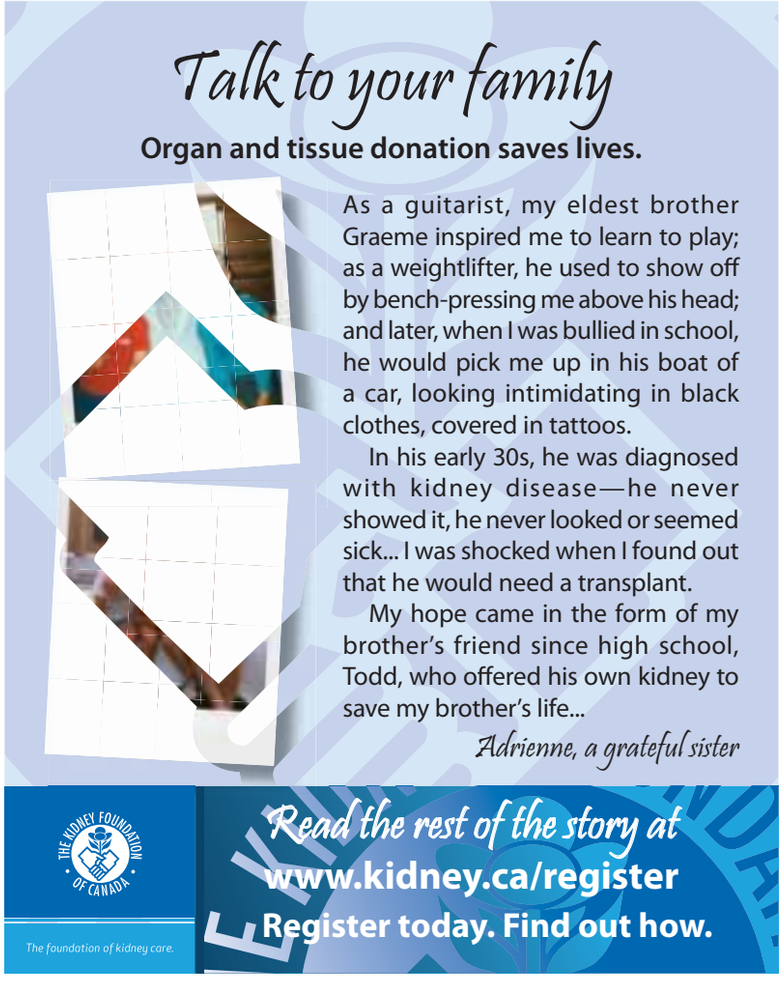
"I think there's still a lack of understanding about how HIV and AIDS affect people living in our community. Stigma and discrimination are still really big things," she said. "I really respect the people I work with because they are doing their best every day to help clients.

"You don't have to wear a cape to be a super hero and make a difference."

Follow Angela Mullins on Twitter @MetroAngela

How to help

- Natasha Newby, organizer of the AIDS Walk for Life and fund development co-ordinator at the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, is trying to garner $5,000 in walk pledges by Saturday.
- For details about the walk or to make a donation online, visit aidswalkforlife.ca/London.htm and check out the Click here to start fundraising now link.


Talk to your family
Organ and tissue donation saves lives.
As a guitarist, my eldest brother Graeme inspired me to learn to play; as a weightlifter, he used to show off by bench-pressing me above his head; and later, when I was bullied in school, he would pick me up in his boat of a car, looking intimidating in black clothes, covered in tattoos.
In his early 30s, he was diagnosed with kidney disease—he never showed it, he never looked or seemed sick... I was shocked when I found out that he would need a transplant.
My hope came in the form of my brother's friend since high school, Todd, who offered his own kidney to save my brother's life...
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OHL

Knights open training camp

Had enough summer? Good — it's hockey time!

The London Knights open their training camp Tuesday when 75 players are expected to arrive to register. Camp will run for three days, with two full days of scrimmages open to the public at the John Labatt Centre (JLC) on Wednesday and Thursday. It will be Gate 4 entry both days.

Scrimmages are scheduled to start at 8 a.m., 9:45 a.m., 1 p.m., and 2:45 p.m. both Wednesday and Thursday. They're expected to last about 90 minutes each.

The Knights open the OHL preseason on Friday, Aug. 31, when they host the Sarnia Sting at 7:30 p.m. at the JLC. For ticket information, call 519-681-0800, ext. 1 or visit londonknights.com.

Season ticket booklets will be available for pickup Wednesday starting at 9 a.m. at the Knights box office (Gate 4). For more information, contact tickets@londonknights.com or 519-681-0800, ext. 6445. METRO

Western Fair

Cultural Village participants finalized

The 10 participants in the Cultural Village portion of the annual Western Fair have been finalized.

Located on the grounds in the North Park, the daily Cultural Village will represent different cultures through art, crafts, traditional entertainment, music and food. For a full list of participants, visit westernfairdistrict.com, then under The Fair click on Cultural Village. METRO

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Toronto body-parts case.
Ex-boyfriend charged with second-degree murder

An ex-boyfriend of a woman whose body parts were found scattered in two Toronto-area parks has been charged in her death.

Peel Regional Police Insp. George Koekkoek told a news conference the 40-year-old man is charged with second-degree murder in what he described as a "domestic-related homicide."

Chun Qi Jiang was arrested in Toronto on Sunday and remanded into custody when he appeared in court on Monday.

Jiang, a Canadian citizen of Chinese descent, was not previously known to police, Koekkoek said.

The inspector said Jiang had a four-year relationship with Guang Hua Liu, 41, and the couple was recently estranged. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Grisly discoveries

- On Aug. 15, Liu's right foot was found in the Credit River in Mississauga. Liu's head and hands were later discovered in the river.
- Two calves, a thigh and an arm were found in West Highland Creek, just blocks from where she lived in Toronto.

Patent case

Apple seeks ban on 8 Samsung devices

Apple on Monday gave a federal judge a list of eight Samsung products it wants pulled from shelves and banned from the U.S. market.

U.S. District Judge Lucy Koh asked for the list — which consists entirely of smartphones — after a jury in San Jose last week slammed Samsung with a $1.05-billion US verdict, finding that the South Korean technology giant had "wilfully" copied Apple's iPhone and iPad in creating and marketing the products. Samsung plans an appeal. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Senator's wife told to stay away from hubby

Turbulent flight.
Sen. Zimmer, 69, and Sensenberger, 23, were in court Monday

MORGAN MODJESKI
Metro in Saskatoon

A 23-year-old senator's wife charged with causing a disturbance and endangering an aircraft received a bittersweet anniversary gift from a Saskatoon judge.

Maygan Sensenberger was released from jail Monday, but told not to have contact with her husband, Rod Zimmer, a Manitoba senator. She is also prohibited from drinking alcohol and entering bars.

The provincial court judge who issued the ruling didn't explain why Sensenberger is to stay away from her husband, who was also in court.

The couple, who married one year ago, made headlines last Thursday when Saskatoon police were called to meet a plane carrying a disruptive passenger.

The two were flying to Saskatoon from Ottawa when Zimmer experienced tightness in his chest. Sensenberger reacted by becoming upset.

Court records show police believe she uttered threats against her husband and threatened to take down the plane.

No one was injured in last week's incident.

Sensenberger is set to appear in domestic violence court — which sometimes gives people a chance to enter a plea and receive treatment for a lesser sentence — on Tuesday at 9 a.m. WITH FILES FROM THE CANADIAN PRESS

Right: Maygan Sensenberger leaves Provincial Court in Saskatoon on Monday. On the left, Sensenberger and her husband, Rod Zimmer, a Manitoba senator.
LEFT: FACEBOOK; RIGHT: LIAM RICHARDS/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Witness testifies

Fellow passenger Scott Wright said he witnessed the couple arguing, but denied that any threats were made. Wright testified that Sensenberger seemed concerned about her husband's medical condition.

Student protests.
Chaos reigns in return to universities

The calm of summer was shattered Monday with the return of school to Quebec universities, where some classes were disrupted as protesters disobeyed the back-to-school law.

Chaotic scenes, reminiscent of those seen across the province in the spring, suddenly flared up at two Montreal universities after a relatively quiet summer.

The province passed an emergency law, known as Bill 78, to set stiff fines for people who prevent students from attending class.

A tumultuous standoff erupted in the corridors of Universite de Montreal between security guards and masked protesters. The demonstrators were trying to spring seven of their comrades who had been detained by officials in a fourth-floor classroom.

Meanwhile, across town, masked demonstrators entered Universite du Quebec a Montreal and disrupted classes. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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A clerk works at a Dollar Rent A Car outlet in New York.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Auto rentals

Hertz buys Dollar Thrifty for $2.3B

More than two years after its original bid, Hertz agreed Sunday to buy Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group for about $2.3 billion US, giving it more ways to attract travellers and expand its international presence.

At $87.50 per share, the deal is worth far more than any of Hertz's previous bids and about 8 per cent higher than Dollar Thrifty's closing price Friday.

Travelers that rent through Dollar Thrifty will still visit that counter for service. In the long run, prices in many markets will almost certainly rise as the two companies streamline their operations.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fewer packages

Canada Post reports $10M loss in Q2

Canadians mailed fewer packages through Canada Post in the second quarter, eroding results across most of the Crown corporation's operations, while its courier business Purolator got a boost partly from more orders sent by e-commerce retailers.

Noting that the "decline of mail is not something that's going to rebound," Canada Post said that reality would weigh on any new labour agreement with its workers.

The company reported a loss of $10 million, or $4 million after taxes, on Monday, which marks an improvement from a loss $18 million, or $17 million after taxes, a year earlier.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Housing affordability still eroding

Higher home prices. Possible interest-rate increases next year could strain ownership and ultimately cool housing markets

Housing affordability continued to erode in most markets across Canada in the second quarter as a result of higher home prices and interests rates, but there were a few bright spots.

Alberta, in particular, solidified its position as having the most affordable housing market thanks to a significant drop in prices for electricity and natural gas, says a quarterly Royal Bank housing report.

Montreal also enjoyed improved affordability, which prompted resales to rise 8.6 per cent to reach their third-highest second quarter total, the report said.

A 17 per cent reduction in Alberta utility costs was the biggest contributor to the improvement in the cost of owning a home as a share of household income.

Attractive affordability and a vibrant economy are powerful incentives for home buying. Alberta home resales in the second quarter were the best in five years, surging 18 per cent from a year earlier.

On a national level, however, modest increases in home prices and mortgage rates slightly eroded housing affordability in the quarter.

RBC's affordability index for a detached bungalow stood at 43.4 per cent of income nationally in the second quarter, up 0.2 percentage points from the first quarter but unchanged from a year ago.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Toronto index

- The Toronto index deteriorated by 0.9 percentage points to 54.5 per cent based on $113,700 in annual income.
- While home-ownership costs were above the historical average, they were still well below the peaks experienced during the housing bubble in the late 1980s.

Iraqis flock to faux fast-food franchises

A customer stands outside Burger Friends restaurant in Baghdad, Iraq. A wave of new American-style fast-food restaurants is spreading across the Iraqi capital, enticing customers hungry for alternatives to traditional offerings. Iraqi entrepreneurs and investors from nearby countries, not big multinational chains, are driving the food craze. They see Iraq as an untapped market of increasingly adventurous eaters where competition is low and the potential returns are high. The traditional Arabic restaurants long popular here now find themselves competing against curiously-named rivals such as Florida Fried Chicken, Mr. Potato, Pizza Boat and Burger Friends. There is even a blatant KFC knockoff called KFG, which owner Zaid Sadiq insists stands for Kentucky Family Group. KARIM KADIM/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Wages. Non-union salaries to rise: Survey

Non-union workers across Canada can expect wage increases of 3.2 per cent on average next year, according to an annual survey by Mercer.

The global business consultancy said Monday that the projected wage increases would match actual increases in base pay reported for 2012. They would also be up slightly from the average of three per cent in 2011 and 2.9 per cent in 2010.

Mercer's 2012/2013 Canada Compensation Planning Survey, conducted annually for over 20 years, includes responses from more than 750 employers across Canada and reflects pay practices for approximately two million non-union workers.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Stimulating. Private sector key to economy: Flaherty

Stimulating the economy ultimately falls on the heads of the private sector, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty said Monday.

"We've done a lot through the tax system to encourage Canadian executives, business people, to start utilizing some of the capital they have on their balance sheets," said Flaherty.

"At a certain point, it's not up to the government to stimulate the economy, it's up to the private sector, and they have lots of capital."

Flaherty said the government has already introduced measures in the budget — such as the accelerated capital cost allowance and the mining exploration credit — to compel Canadian corporations to invest some $525 billion of dead cash back into the economy. Beyond that, he said, it's up to the corporations.

Flaherty made the comments to reporters outside the Rogers Centre in Toronto, after the Royal Canadian Mint unveiled a commemorative coin marking the 100th anniversary of the Grey Cup.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Market Minute

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PARK LIFE: FINDING JOY IN THE CITY'S COMMUNAL BACKYARD

SHE SAYS...
Jessica Napier
metronews.ca/voices/she-says

Sometimes I'm jealous of my suburban pals. I don't have a backyard, a barbecue, a deck or a pool; but I do have a park. In the city's concrete jungle, parks are an oasis of green where visitors and residents congregate en masse to enjoy the dog days of Canada's fleeting summer.

Every weekend, downtown dwellers descend from their high-rise abodes to enjoy the street-level wonders of urban parklands. They sprawl out on picnic blankets and people-watch as other park life fans throw Frisbees, walk their dogs and engage in raucous rounds of croquet and bocce ball. After the sun goes down, people bring their own lanterns and sparklers, hosting al fresco birthday parties under the moonlight.

Land of the park-goers

When so much of our urban landscape is claimed by retailers and condo developers, these impromptu gatherings are a way for us to take back public space as something that is truly ours.

This summer, my neighbourhood has been playing host to a series of impromptu outdoor movie nights. These screenings aren't so much an official community event as they are a couple of guys with a projector and enough Facebook friends to get the word out.

Tea light candles demarcate the seating area and the previews are YouTube music videos that inspire dancing from the crowd. Bicycles litter the makeshift aisles and the organizers sell $3 cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon and PWYC popcorn. Is it legal? Definitely not, but it's amazing.

After the movie finishes, everyone gathers their garbage and quietly makes their way home. For the most part, no one is loud and obnoxious; we respect our neighbours and the sanctity of our little patch of green in the heart of the city.

When so much of our urban landscape is claimed by retailers and condo developers, these impromptu gatherings are a way for us to take back public space as something that is truly ours.

Parks are exempt from the rules and commercial interests that govern the rest of the city; they are places to bring home-made meals and make DIY fun. There is no waiting for a table at the park and the price of admission is nil.

My park is where I liberate myself from the monotony of the treadmill and run along winding pathways and hidden trails. It is where I go to be alone with a book or reconnect with friends over a game of scrabble accompanied by a concealed bottle of wine. It is the bonus piece of beautiful green space that was never advertised with my 800-square-foot apartment.

As cityscapes become increasingly dominated by paved sidewalks and towering structures of concrete and glass, our parks, no matter how small, feel like an expanse of natural realness. They should be enjoyed and celebrated but most importantly, preserved.

Follow Jessica Napier on Twitter @MetroSheSays

A sunbather does a cartwheel in Manhattan's Westside Park in New York City earlier this summer. JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

Look before you leap

NATE CHAPPELL/REX FEATURES

Frog legs

Flipped like a pancake

This picture of a wild supper was captured in Missouri City, Texas, by photography tour operator Nate Chappell.

The yellow-crowned night heron preys on frogs but has to flip them several times in order to swallow them.

This two-legged bird needed several attempts to consume its meal.

METRO

Nate Chappell CONTRIBUTED

Q & A with the photog

- **How did you get the shot?** The heron was preoccupied with eating the frog so it let me approach fairly close. I got down low in the grass to get a more intimate view and better background. I crawled on my hands and knees to get closer to the bird, knowing that the bird was less likely to fly off if I was crawling. The bipedal form of humans is how most animals recognize humans and consider us a threat.

Long-time nesters

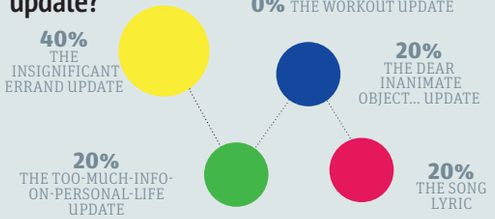
20

The number of years a yellow-crowned night heron family will inhabit a single nest. This is remarkable loyalty as the bird only lives for around six years, but its family will stay far beyond that. However, in many of the U.S. breeding grounds, the nests are under threat from hunters.

Metropolitan Panel

Register at metropolitanpanel.ca and take the quick poll

What's the most annoying Facebook status update?


0% THE WORKOUT UPDATE
40% THE INSIGNIFICANT ERRAND UPDATE
20% THE DEAR INANIMATE OBJECT... UPDATE
20% THE TOO-MUCH-INFO-ON-PERSONAL-LIFE UPDATE
20% THE SONG LYRIC

Twitter

@joshanderson_77: Heading to London to start a new season with the knights. Had a great summer. #2012-2013

@barryweston: Issues like this latest one relating to London Hydro are exactly why I can't stand this city. #ldnont

@OrchestraLondon: Good morning #ldnont! Glad the rain waited until Monday.

@caabral__: 6 more sleeps and I'll be living in london #westernu #excited

@Styeiles: Someone bumped into my back bumper and then drove off... Thanks! #hitandrun, #ldnont,

@ForrestBivens: Technology b-slapped. Tweeted to correct auto-correct error, only 2 discover auto-correct pooched correction #Igiveup

metro

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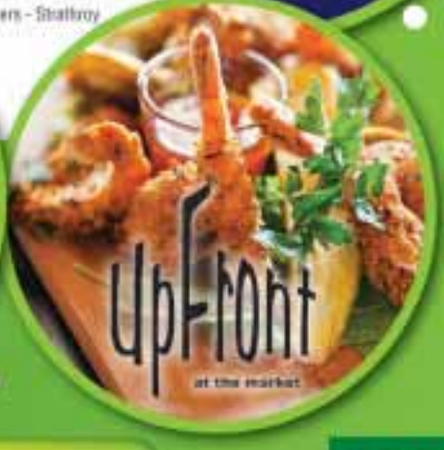


upFront

at the market

Check out these items and more!

Bidding Starts September 7

metro

DVD reviews

Battleship

Director. Peter Berg

Stars. Alexander Skarsgård, Brooklyn Decker, Liam Neeson

●●○○○

The reliable Liam Neeson elevates every film he puts his name to, including pay cheque gigs like Clash of the Titans. But even he couldn't keep Battleship from tanking. Based in name only on the old Hasbro board game, the Peter Berg-directed film awkwardly yokes a romantic redemption tale with a sci-fi potboiler about space aliens invading Earth. Neeson gives good stare in Battleship, as the admiral in charge of the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet. That's about all he gives, but you can't blame him. The characters are little more than game pieces in this exercise in CGI overkill. Taylor Kitsch is the putative star, playing screw-up Alex Hopper, who fails at the high ideals set by his Navy-straight older brother Stone (Alexander Skarsgård). Battleship gives little reason to care about these characters. The state of your hearing after all the boom-boom would be of greater concern.

PETER HOWELL

Headhunters

Director. Morten Tyldum

Stars. Aksel Hennie, Synnove Macody Lund, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau

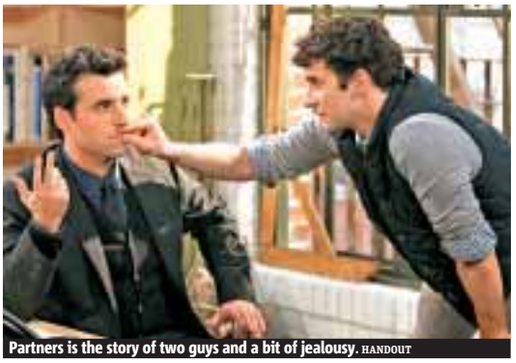
●●●●○

Headhunters begins as a caper flick — we even get an opening how-to in the art of art theft — before transforming into a chase thriller, with both sections of director Morten Tyldum's film equally engrossing. Aksel Hennie is Roger Brown, a corporate talent scout who takes his occupation so seriously, he may as well be collecting scalps. Despite his impeccably tailored suits and outwardly genteel manners, Roger has a furtive look, resembling a Scandinavian Steve Buscemi. Roger is really a boor and conman. The craftiest trick of this well-written Norwegian film, though, is the way it shifts our sympathies from despising Roger at the outset to somewhere close to cheering for him at the end.

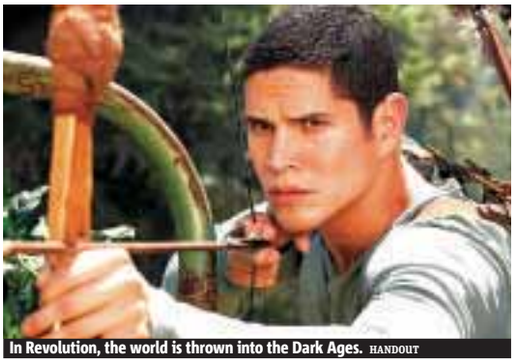
PETER HOWELL

Could Chicago Fire be pigeonholed as a public safety show?

Matthew Perry is a bereaved radio host in Go On. PHOTOS: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Partners is the story of two guys and a bit of jealousy. HANDOUT



In Revolution, the world is thrown into the Dark Ages. HANDOUT

TV's fresh fall crop a rather safe fare

Predictable choices. With the exception of Animal Practice, new programs seem to be sticking to tried-and-true formulas

Here's a fearless prediction for the new fall season: Animal Practice will be either a hit or a big-time miss; either a comedy game-changer for NBC or a punch line for its ratings desperation.

This sitcom about a veterinarian and his monkey sidekick is already commanding the attention of viewers. NBC has heavily hyped it, most notably by interrupting the Olympics closing ceremony to air a preview of the show and enraging viewers waiting for the Who.

But who cares if they're angry? For any new show, just getting noticed is half the battle. Between now and December, Animal Practice (airing on Global in Canada) is among nearly two dozen series getting launched by the five broadcast networks, which for weeks have been feverishly hyping the new crop with everything from bus ads to Twitter feeds, plus multi-platform previews of some shows, like Animal Practice, thrown in.

All of this is done with the certain knowledge that at least two-thirds of the new fare, no matter how relentlessly promoted, will have fallen by the wayside by this time next year.

Remember these duds from last fall: Charlie's Angels? Free Agents? How to be a Gentleman? Does a similar fate await Animal Practice, which stars Justin Kirk as a misanthropic veterinarian and Crystal, a scene-stealing capuchin monkey, as his oddly human second banana?

Or what about Go On, an NBC comedy (airing on Global in Canada) that casts Matthew Perry as a sports-talk radio host forced to attend grief counselling after the death of his wife? Can sadness trigger hilarity?

Or what about Chicago Fire (airing on Global in Canada) an action drama about firefighters from Law & Order maestro Dick Wolf? Chicago Fire could be pigeonholed as a show about public safety, but bona fide cop dramas — one of TV's most enduring genres — are represented by three fanciful variations.

On Vegas, CBS' robust new drama (airing on Global in Canada) set in the early 1960s, Dennis Quaid plays a rancher-turned-sheriff of the budding gambling mecca, with Michael Chiklis a mobster casino boss.

NBC's Elementary (airing on Global in Canada) stars Jonny Lee Miller as a modern-day detective with the name and quirkiness of legendary Sherlock Holmes, and Lucy Liu as Dr. Joan Watson. They assist the New York Police Department with solving crimes.

And the CW's Beauty and the Beast (airing on Showcase in Canada) features a lovely young homicide detective (Kristin Kreuk) who reconnects with a handsome young doctor who saved her life when a teenager. She also discovers his terrible secret: Thanks to a military experiment gone awry, when he is enraged, he becomes a terrifying beast with uncontrollable strength.

Meanwhile, there's just one new lawyer show on tap: CBS' Made in Jersey (airing on Global in Canada), which stars British actress Janet Montgomery as a young working-class Jerseyite from a long line of self-taught beauticians, a gal who bought her attache case not on Madison Avenue but down the shore. She lands a job across the river at a prestigious Manhattan law firm where her style raises eyebrows but wins cases.

Autumn will bring three new doctor dramas, each of which — like Made in Jersey — is headlined by a woman.

Jordana Spiro stars in Fox's The Mob Doctor (airing on CTV in Canada) as a Chicago surgeon whose obligations to the mafia require her to give medical treatment to a gang of hoods.

On the CW's Emily Owens M.D. (airing on CTV in Canada), Mamie Gummer plays a young med-school grad who's beginning a hospital internship full of hope. And on the Fox comedy The Mindy Project, creator-star Mindy Kaling plays a thriving OBGYN whose personal life is a succession of pratfalls.

NBC's edgy The New Normal (airing on CTV in Canada) finds gay couple Andrew Rannells and Justin Bartha concluding there's only one thing missing from their happy home: a child. They line up a surrogate mom (Georgia King) to carry it for them.

Also trading on the gay theme is Partners (airing on Citytv in Canada), with David Krumholtz as Joe and Michael Urie as Louis, partnered architects and best friends since high school. Louis is gay and Joe is straight, which isn't a problem until Joe decides to marry his girlfriend and Louis feels the sharp pangs of jealousy.

Besides the hybrid Beauty and the Beast, the networks have scheduled five other series with a supernatural, sci-fi or fantasy twist.

At the start of NBC's epic new drama Revolution (airing on Citytv in Canada) the lights abruptly go out, around the world. This unexplained power outage deprives everyone of every piece of electrical technology, stranding humanity in a modern-day Dark Age with no end in sight.

Let's hope this fate doesn't really befall humanity as we look forward to 2012's fall TV season.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SCENE2

On the web

After a century of movie copyrights, piracy and preservation still present challenges.

METRO DISH

OUR TAKE ON THE WORLD OF CELEBRITIES

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt

Pitt children let loose in French toy store

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie squeezed in a little late-summer vacation time, taking four of their six kids to the coastal town of Le Touquet, France, over the weekend, according to People magazine.

Pitt and Jolie treated daughters Zahara, Shiloh and Vivienne along with son Knox to pizza before letting them loose on a local toy store Jolie had visited before.

"I wasn't notified of their visit. I didn't expect it. I didn't even recognize them. I said 'Bonjour' like I do to all my clients and then I saw Brad Pitt," an employee of Culture Kid tells the magazine. "Since Angelina was here with her son last year, the shop has moved, but they found us."

Kellan Lutz

Twilight actor misses the pre-fame days

Despite the mega-success of the Twilight film franchise, Kellan Lutz kind of misses the good old days.

"My favourite moments were during the first movie, before any of this craze happened. We were just ourselves, no one really knew who we were yet," Lutz tells Us Weekly. "We haven't changed per se, but we were able to get away with a lot more." And while some members of the cast have dealt with the spotlight better than others, Lutz insists the series' popularity caught them all off guard.

"I don't really like to comment on everyone else's process, but I think we've all done the best we could with this," he says. "It can be surreal sometimes. I don't know if we all knew what we were fully getting into on all fronts."

The Word

Tom Cruise kept the diamonds coming

THE WORD
Monica Weymouth
scene@metronews.ca

Say what you will about Tom Cruise — we certainly do — but the guy isn't cheap.

During their five-year marriage, Tom Cruise showered Katie Holmes with the type of gifts found only under the Scientology Christmas tree.

"Tom was extremely generous to Katie with lavish gifts during their marriage, and she will be keeping millions of dollars of jewelry, Hermes handbags and other luxurious items," a source tells RadarOnline.

"Tom gave Katie diamond earrings as a birthday gift one year that easily cost over $500,000, and he had custom design pieces made for her."

Under the terms of their divorce, Holmes gets to keep the swag and is free to sell it if her earlobes get tired — meaning, we can only hope, that she won't need that Dawson's Creek reunion paycheck.

Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds

Happy couple, Reynolds, Lively going strong

After almost a year together, Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively are still going strong, according to People magazine. The happy couple was spotted in New York City last week celebrating Lively's 25th birthday with an indulgent treat at Serendipity 3. "They were very attentive to each other, sitting close and very into each other," an eyewitness says. "They were oblivious to what was going on around them,"

John Mayer

John Mayer makes some life changes

Looks like John Mayer really was in the mood for some major change.

After reportedly breaking up with Katy Perry following a few weeks of dating, the singer unveiled a new, shorter haircut, ditching the curly locks he'd been sporting for a while, according to Us Weekly.

And while Mayer seems to be moving on, Perry is reportedly not taking the split very well. "She's really upset about it," a source says. "She is making it seem like it wasn't serious with John, but she is hurt."

Twitter

@SethMacFarlane
A big part of my life is trying to apply Purell without being noticed by the person who just shook my hand.

@BetteMidler
Gentle readers, by now you have gathered that I have been interested in wacky weather ever since I saw smog for the first time 40 yrs ago..

@rustyrockets
I deny all hurtful rumours that I have invented bejeweled hover-shoes. Lawyers tell me they are fashionable.

@SandraBernhard
camping is fine as long as someone else does all the work

Visual aids can be used to help remind people that they have reached their limits on snacking. HANDOUT

Obey the stop sign for snacking

Health options. New study shows that visual cues can effectively cut down on consumption of snack and junk foods in your home

BEN KNIGHT
life@metronews.ca

Snacks are seductive. So delicious. So satisfying.

Not always healthy, though — and overindulgence is a constant danger.

But new research from Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., suggests that visual cues can effectively cut consumption, without really damaging enjoyment.

Cornell's food and brand lab dyed every seventh chip in a stack of potato chips red, then gave them to unsuspecting test subjects.

"We simply had marker chips in there," says lab director Brian Wansink, author of Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think.

"We didn't say anything. There was no mention of why it was red, or anything. Simply having a marker chip in there led people to eat either seven or 14 chips. They got to the point where they'd see this stop sign. They might eat one or two more chips, but they wouldn't eat 50 more."

By the numbers

$2.1B

$2.13 billion is the value of snack food products shipped by Canadian producers in 2009.

A happy accident, or real science?

"We did the study three times, because the first time, it seemed too good to be true," he says. "Every time we did it, we saw this huge, huge effect."

But does it work when people know what the red chip means? Can this work with other snack foods, which don't so easily stack?

"Yes, yes, yes!" Wansink enthuses. "You can break your snacks up into little baggies. It may not be good for the environment, but it gives you a visual stop sign. Or you can use a twist seal to reseal a candy bar after you've eaten part of it."

He also suggests eating ice cream out of a little bowl.

"You can go back for seconds. You can go back for thirds! The empty bowl is kind of a red chip, saying 'Hey, do you want more?' You can have more, but you have to make that decision."

Wansink insists that eating less doesn't mean there's a matching drop in snack satisfaction.

"What we find is that it doesn't seem to be the amount. It's just whether you get the snack or not. We find that people get tremendous satisfaction out of just half the amount they would otherwise eat.

"Visual stop signs cause you to think twice."

Best Health

Breathe easy this fall

BEST HEALTH MINUTE
Bonnie Munday
Editor-in-chief
Best Health Magazine

In much of Canada, the peak for fall allergies is the third week of September, thanks to weed pollens (mostly ragweed) and mould spores. In the September issue of Best Health magazine, health writer Michelle Villett rounds up treatments for allergy-related sniffles and sneezes. Speak to your doctor to be sure you're choosing the right remedy. Meantime, here are some highlights from our longer article. (Remember to always follow package directions closely.)

Oral antihistamines (Allegra-D, Benadryl Allergy Liqui-Gels)
They block chemical receptors in our bodies that react to histamines; they don't cure allergies but they do control symptoms such as a runny nose and itching.

Tip
Diphenhydramine, an ingredient found in products including Benadryl, can cause drowsiness. Newer ingredients, one of which is fexofenadine (found in Allegra D), have fewer side-effects.

Nasal decongestants (Claritin Nasal Pump, Dristan Nasal Spray)
When allergens enter the nasal cavities, they cause blood vessels to expand; these decongestants help shrink them. But don't take these for longer than three to five days, because it's possible to become dependent.

Eye drops (Visine Allergy Advance Eye Drops with Antihistamines, Albalon Eye Drops Liquifilm Decongestant).
They combine antihistamine and decongestant, and work the same way as the oral remedies, except they are for the eyes.

Tip
Because our eyes flush drops out, they are best used for temporary symptom relief before your oral remedy starts to work.

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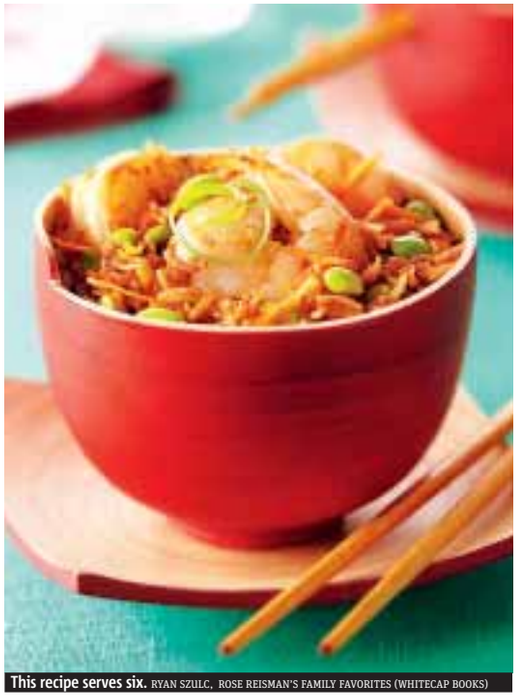
On the Web

US Open defending champ Samantha Stosur on fitness, Japanese food, kick serves

Finally, a healthy version of Shrimp Fried Rice



This recipe serves six. RYAN SZULC, ROSE REISMAN'S FAMILY FAVORITES (WHITECAP BOOKS)

ROSE REISMAN
for more, visit
rosereisman.com

Fried rice in Asian restaurants is often made with lard or excess oil, adding enormous amounts of calories and fat.

I use a stock-based sauce that only uses a tablespoon of sesame oil. Also, instead of traditional green peas, I use edamame. That brings the calories per serving to 309 and the total fat to 5.4 grams.

1. Sauce: Whisk chicken stock, soy sauce, sesame oil and chili sauce in a small bowl. Set aside.

2. Add rice to stock and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer 10 minutes. Remove from heat and let sit for 10 minutes, covered.

3. Lightly coat large skillet or wok with cooking spray, add oil and set over medium-high heat. Add onion and sauté 5 minutes or until softened. Add garlic and ginger and sauté 1 more minute. Add shrimp and edamame and sauté 3 minutes or until the shrimp just turns pink. Stir in the carrots and green onions.

4. Add cooked rice to shrimp mix. Add sauce and stir-fry 2 minutes, or until everything is warmed through and rice is coated with sauce. Serve hot.

ROSE REISMAN'S FAMILY FAVORITES (WHITECAP BOOKS) BY ROSE REISMAN

Ingredients

Sauce
- 1/3 cup chicken stock
- 3 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tbsp sesame oil
- 1 tsp hot chili sauce

Rice
- 1 1/2 cups white rice
- 1 1/2 cups chicken stock
- 2 tsp vegetable oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 tsp each finely chopped garlic and ginger
- 4 oz raw shrimp, peeled, deveined and diced
- 1 cup frozen shelled edamame
- 1/2 cup each grated carrots and chopped green onions

Health Solutions

Cereal killer

NUTRI-BITES
Theresa Albert, DHN, RNCP
myfriendinfood.com

Say "fibre" and everyone thinks "bran," but there is a world beyond wheat that may be even better for you.

One of the key nutrients required for, ahem, regularity is magnesium and magnesium can be bound by wheat bran rendering it inabsorbable.

So over the long haul, you want to vary the source of bulking substance like wheat bran (insoluble fibre) and add cholesterol lowering, blood sugar regulating soluble fibre from other sources. (And I will try to keep this clean...promise.)

Insoluble Fibre Sources

1. Kidney and Lima Beans, Lentils and Dried Peas
Kidney and lima beans as well as lentils and dried peas are fabulous sources of soluble fibre. Find a way to work them into your soup, rice or entrée daily.

2. Psyllium Husk
Psyllium husk is found in some breakfast cereals but also as a powdered supplement that can be added to just about anything.

3. Barley
Barley is a fabulous alternative to rice. Cooked in stock and stirred with grated Parmesan cheese, it is almost risotto-like. Tossed into salads and soups it adds texture and flavour.

What insoluble fibre does is pull water into the bowel to form an easy to pass gel. This prolongs stomach emptying time to slow down digestion of sugars and helps capture and remove bad fats. Easy, peasy...get it?

THERESA ALBERT IS AN AUTHOR AND NUTRITIONIST IN TORONTO. SHE IS @THERESAALBERT ON TWITTER AND FOUND DAILY AT MYFRIENDINFOOD.COM

Thai Barley Salad.
Seasonings spice up this easy summer side dish

1. In saucepan, bring 625 ml (2 1/2 cups) lightly salted water to boil. Meanwhile, rinse barley; add to boiling water. Cover and simmer until tender but still slightly chewy, about 25 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water. Drain well, then place in bowl.

2. In bowl, whisk lime juice, vinegar, chili garlic sauce, fish sauce, sugar and salt until sugar is dissolved. Whisk in oil.

3. Cut peaches and red pepper into 2-cm (3/4-inch) pieces. Add to barley along with green onions, spinach, bean sprouts and mint. Drizzle with dressing. Toss to combine. THE CANADIAN PRESS/ FOODLAND ONTARIO

Ingredients

- 175 ml (3/4 cup) pearl barley
- 30 ml (2 tbsp) each lime juice and unseasoned rice vinegar
- 15 ml (1 tbsp) hot Asian chili garlic sauce
- 7 ml (1 1/2 tsp) each fish sauce and granulated sugar
- 2 ml (1/2 tsp) salt
- 30 ml (2 tbsp) vegetable oil
- 2 locally grown peaches
- 1 sweet red pepper
- 2 green onions, thinly sliced
- 500 ml (2 cups) baby spinach
- 250 ml (1 cup) bean sprouts
- 50 ml (1/4 cup) chopped fresh mint

Flavour gets all rolled up: Pork and Cashew Rice Paper Rolls

For something a bit different, try these Pork and Cashew Rolls, which use rice paper. Rice paper is used for making fresh summer rolls (salad rolls) or fried spring rolls in Vietnamese cuisine. It offers a great contrast texture to the ingredients that are rolled up in it.

1. Slice pork tenderloin in half lengthwise, cut halves into thin strips. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat; cook pork until browned, about 10 minutes.

2. Add 1/2 cup (125 ml) of the garlic rib sauce. Cook for another 5 minutes until sauce glazes the meat, set aside.

3. Place one sheet of rice paper in large bowl of warm water to soften, about 1 minute. Carefully remove paper and lay on work surface. In the bottom third of paper, place small piece of lettuce, top with small pile of noodles (about 2 tbsp/30 ml). Top noodles with fillings, being careful not to overstuff or the paper will tear.

4. Fold the bottom of paper over top of fillings and begin to roll into a cylinder. Fold sides in and continue rolling to enclose. Once all the rolls are finished slice in half; serve with remaining 1/2 cup (125 ml) of the garlic rib sauce for dipping.

NEWS CANADA/VHSAUCES.COM

Ingredients

- 500 g (1 lb) pork tenderloin
- 15 ml (1 tbsp) vegetable oil
- 250 ml (1 cup) VH Medium Garlic Rib Sauce
- 10 rice papers (or as many as needed)
- 10 lettuce leaves, a tender variety such as red or green leaf, Bibb or Boston
- 125 g (4 1/2 oz) thin rice vermicelli noodles (half a package), soaked and drained

Filling
- 50 ml (1/2 cup) each fresh mint, green onions, cashews or peanuts, finely chopped
- 250 ml (1 cup) julienned cucumber (and/or julienned red pepper strips, carrots or mangoes)

This recipe serves four. NEWS CANADA

Advice

Talking about expensive wedding gifts

CHARLES THE BUTLER
askcharlesthebutler@metronews.ca
For more, visit charlesmacpherson.com

My boyfriend and I have been together for more than 15 years, and he is from a large family, with more than 20 nieces and nephews, most of whom are now in their early-to-late 20s. When these nieces and nephews start to get married, we will have to attend their weddings and buy a gift. Isn't the usual gift amount about $75 to $100/person attending? My boyfriend hasn't worked in years and we live in a small one-bedroom rented apartment, which I pay for. And since my boyfriend doesn't have any money, I will be paying for these gifts. This has already happened over the years. I don't want to be forced to pay for an expensive gift for his family. The suggestion of not attending any of the weddings could be awkward, but that's a lot of weddings to attend and pay for gifts, or to avoid. Can you please advise your suggestion on this situation?
Thank you,
Not Cheap but Poor

Dear Not Cheap but Poor,

I am a very firm believer that you should never put yourself into debt when giving a present, and it is wrong for anyone to expect this of you. I would think that the rest of the family would have the same predicament.

So the first thing that comes to mind is that perhaps the family would consider a "common family gift" that everyone can put what they can afford in a jar and with that money you buy one present (or the total sum of monies collected) on behalf of the entire family, or at least the contributors.

Thus if you can afford $10, $20 or more, that is your contribution, however, everyone only puts in what they can, and everyone signs the card equally. Good luck, and please let us know what happens.

You should never put yourself in debt when giving a gift. ISTOCK

'Intervention meets Sex and the City'

Reality TV. Reformed 'other woman' offers plenty of advice in The Mistress, which premieres Wednesday

MELISSA REBER
For Metro

If you're caught in a love triangle with a married man, Sarah Symonds has some advice for you: "Get out! Don't walk, run! He will never leave his wife for you."

Sarah would know; she calls herself the reformed "other woman" after a string of affairs (including ones with chef Gordon Ramsay and Jeffrey Archer) left her heartbroken and alone.

She wrote the book Having an Affair? A Handbook For The Other Woman, which stirred up major media interest on the controversial subject. Now she has teamed up with Great Pacific Media to produce a reality show called The Mistress, where she will work with women stuck in these dysfunctional relationships to help set them on the right path. The show premieres Wednesday at 8 p.m. ET on Slice.

What was it that attracted you to the lifestyle of 'the other woman'? What made you finally stop?

At the time I started I was in my late 20s, I was mixing in a high octane PR world. I didn't have the filter to say no. Most of the men I dated were unavailable or married, although sometimes I didn't know that at first. In 2006 I had my heart broken beyond words and that's what made me sit down and write my book. Then when the Gordon Ramsay scandal broke, I didn't want to be that girl in the tabloids and have my parents see that. I wanted to be done with it.

Have you ever been confronted by one of the wives (any fights)?

No physical fights, but I've called both the wives of the men I really loved. It was not out of malice, it was out of pain, but the reaction I got when I called the wives… they were so matter of fact, and there I was bawling my eyes out. They just said, 'OK, I'll have a talk with him when he gets home.'

It was unbelievable.

There are some altercations on the show, but it's not about that and it's not about exposing him (the man). It's a raw subject and I'm trying to get them out of this toxic relationship, and when that happens there are going to be confrontations.

What are the top three signs that your partner might be cheating/has a mistress?

1. If he's suddenly mysterious about his cellphone, if he doesn't want you to see his missed calls or text or he goes into the washroom to use his cellphone — wake up! Who does that? He's probably hiding something.

2. If he says he needs alone time or is willing to run around doing any errands he normally wouldn't.

Remember that the "other woman" is always asking to see him so to keep her happy he'll have to find excuses to get out of the house.

3. If he suddenly offers to do his own laundry — what man does that? He might be trying to make sure you don't see any stains on his shirt or a fancy restaurant receipt he left in his pocket.

You've got instincts, use them! If you think something is wrong, investigate it. Having said all that, don't be paranoid, but don't be stupid. Be real.

Advice for the wives?

Wives need to wake up! After you get married you have to still be the woman he married. This might be harsh, but if you're not sleeping with your husband someone else is. But I don't place the blame only on the wife or on the husband; there is blame on both sides. Men — go home and talk to your wife. If it's not working out then end it. It's called wedlock not deadlock!

What's the difference between mistresses around the world?

I hear from women everywhere. Just last week I got emails from women in Manila (Philippines), India, Australia… and it's all textbook details; same situation, different location.

Tell me a bit about the show. What should viewers expect?

It's a mix of Intervention meets Sex and the City. It has a redemption edge to it, but it's a wake-up call for mistresses. My work is over five days with them and I want to get them to realize they are worth more and to move on. Each story is so different… different ages, colours, circumstances.

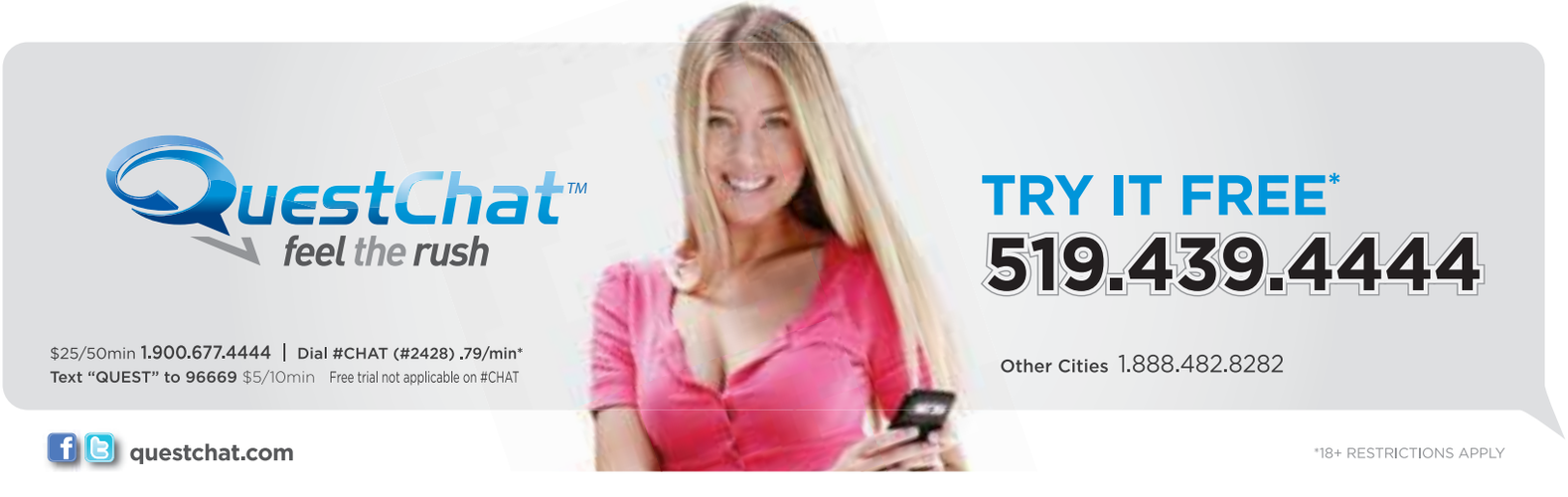
This show is myth busting. You typically think of the busty blond being the mistress, but on the show what we see is so far from that stereotype. It'll blow your mind.

It took a Canadian company to believe in me, so bravo to Canada for taking a chance.

People are interested and searching for this info. And who knew there was so much infidelity here (laughs).

We've already done 14 episodes and women keep knocking on my door wanting to be involved in the show!

Sarah Symonds



Ready, set, head for the border!

Alison's Money Rule. Keep travel and accommodation costs low to save big on cross-border shopping

YOUR MONEY
Alison Griffiths
money@metronews.ca

There are plenty of good reasons to cross the border for your shopping needs. ISTOCK IMAGES

Desperately seeking last minute back to school deals? Go south.

Call me unpatriotic and a Canadian business killer, but financially stressed families can't be faulted for wanting to save money by taking advantage of cheaper prices.

New customs rules and a strong loonie provide good reasons to head into the US for all those must have school clothes, electronics and other goodies.

But if you go be prepared for long waits during peak times this weekend as the 50 million visits annually by Canadians to the U.S. is the highest in two decades.

Higher limits on what we can bring back to Canada went into effect in June, which will only boost that visitor number.

For stays of 24 hours the import limit is $200, up from $50, and a flat $800 if you stay more than 48 hours, up from $400 for two day visits and $750 for a week or more.

According to the most recent BMO Capital Markets cross border shopping report, some of the best deals south of 49 are the kinds of things kids need\want for school.

For example, running shoes are 37 per cent cheaper in the States, those adorable Pottery Barn Kids backpacks cost 26 per cent less and you'll save 19 per cent on kids' Gap T-shirts.

A basket of U.S. goods including diapers, BBQs, iPods, golf balls and small appliances produces a savings of 14 per cent.

However, don't just focus on prices.

Factor in the cost of gas, meals, hotel as well as duty and GST and HST if you go over limit — which is very easy to do.

Group trips — mini-van anyone? — will certainly save on gas and using loyalty points for hotels is another good strategy.

Don't forget to take the exchange rate into account. Though the posted rate may show the loonie at par or better, when you buy greenbacks it will cost you three to four cents more.

In numbers

2.7

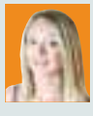
The number of Canadian visits to the U.S. for every one American trip to Canada.

And if you use your credit or debit card there will be an exchange rate differential plus (usually) a 2.5 percent transaction fee.

YOU CAN CHECK OUT BORDER WAIT TIMES AT APPS.CBP.GOV/BWT/INDEX.ASP, CBSA-ASFC.GC.CA/BWT-TAF/MENU-ENG.HTML.

Affordable travel

When loyalty doesn't pay off



FUN AND FRUGAL
Lesley Scorgie
money@metronews.ca

I had my frugal butt kicked last week as I planned an affordable last minute trip to Europe. In light of the Euro-zone debt crises, some of the most inexpensive international holidays at the moment are European vacations.

I had the right idea on how to save money – wait until after the Olympics, be semi-flexible on the location, try to snag a last minute travel special and use loyalty points for flights, rail and hotels.

But, when it came time to redeem my travel rewards, I couldn't use a single point towards any part of the trip.

My first error was waiting too long to book; my second error was trying to book a seat sale on flights through my VISA points — which I have done on previous occasions.

But because I didn't leave enough time in advance, according to VISA's policy, the cheap flights were not available nor eligible for point redemption.

A July 2012 American Express survey revealed that approximately 19 per cent of North Americans use loyalty points for travel throughout the summer months; hence the limited availability.

The next eye-opener for me was learning the true cost of trying to use loyalty rewards semi-last-minute; the amount of points it takes to purchase a ticket can be triple the normal amount. No thanks! That's a bad deal!

That's when I decided to book my seat sale without using points and instead I paid with cash.

Thankfully, with a strong Canadian dollar, off-season pricing and switching to a local airline from London, the price tag was 50 per cent less than if I were to have planned travelling mid-summer.

Post purchase, I learned through Google research that the greatest value travel point collectors receive is when they use their points for business or first class tickets.

Thus, I tried one last time to use my points for an upgrade to business class for the long-haul portion of the trip.

NO-GO.

Because I'd booked seats on sale my 'cheap seats' weren't eligible for upgrades … on any segment of the trip.

I still believe in collecting points because I love free things. But, my unpleasant experience has taught me that to maximize the greatest value from a loyalty program, book well in advance.

I'd also recommend avoiding rewards programs you don't plan to redeem within a short time frame (five years or less).

This is because the longer you wait, the more likely it is the point system will change and adjust to the increasing cost of providing the rewards.

Follow Lesley on Twitter @LesleyScorgie

NFL

Jackson in, Young out as Bills' backup

The Buffalo Bills have a new backup in Tarvaris Jackson, and they've cut Vince Young in a sudden shuffle of quarterbacks on Monday.

Shortly after announcing they had released Young, the Bills followed up to confirm reports that they had acquired Jackson in a trade with the Seattle Seahawks in exchange for an undisclosed draft pick.

It was a surprising turn of events that came in the final week of the preseason, and after Young struggled in his bid to win the backup job in a 38-7 loss to Pittsburgh on Saturday.

"Vince, I don't want to get into what he can do and can't do, it just didn't work out," general manager Buddy Nix said. "We just need to move on and give this guy a try."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vince Young GETTY IMAGES FILE

NFL

Eagles say Vick is nearly ready to go

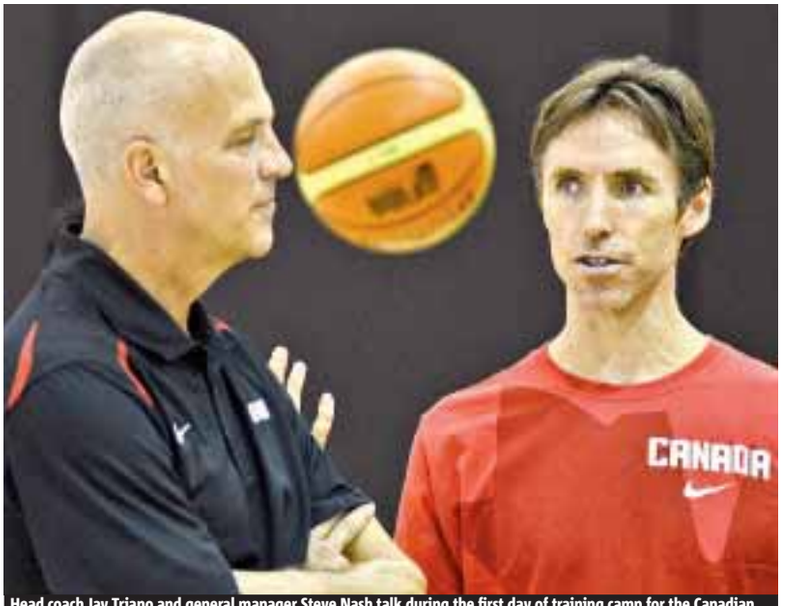
Michael Vick will take his next snap in the season opener for the Philadelphia Eagles.

Vick was back at practice Monday after leaving last Monday's game with injured ribs and offensive co-ordinator Marty Mornhinweg said the star quarterback is "real close to 100 per cent."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Triano looking for big Canadian commitment

Basketball. Eyeing Olympic berth in Rio, national team coach expects four-year pact from his players



Head coach Jay Triano and general manager Steve Nash talk during the first day of training camp for the Canadian men's national basketball team in Toronto on Friday. TARA WALTON/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE

Jay Triano has witnessed firsthand how the United States men's basketball team changed from underachievers to back-to-back Olympic gold medals.

He believes the same approach will lead Canada to it's first Olympic berth since 2000, and he expects his players to buy in for the long haul.

Just two weeks after the London Olympics closed, Triano and his coaching staff were putting a promising roster of players through shooting drills Monday at the end of a five-day training camp designed to prepare Canada for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games.

Triano, just days into his second stint as national team head coach, expects players at the camp to commit to the national team for four years, saying the long-term pledge is essential to getting Canada back on basketball's world stage. Triano was an assistant coach on the U.S. national team when it went from an underachieving group that settled for an Olympic bronze medal in 2004 to a cohesive powerhouse.

"I think gone are the days when you can throw 12 players out there and expect to compete, and I think my time with the United States team showed that," Triano said. "Jerry Colangelo asked those players for a three-year commitment. When they did that and the players became committed, that's when they became successful and won back-to-back gold medals."

Canada hasn't always been able to field its best possible team in Olympic competition. Star guard Steve Nash, now the team's general manager, stopped playing for Canada after it failed to qualify for the 2004 Olympics and focused on his NBA career. Centre Jamaal Magloire, who has been working with the big men at the camp, opted not to play during the height of his career. Centre Samuel Dalembert was dismissed from the team after a rift with former coach Leo Rautins.

"If we're going to be successful guys are going to commit," Triano said. "The fact that they're here working as hard as they are right now speaks volumes to their commitment. We're going to have to decide as a staff which players we want to move forward and be part of our commitment to the program."

In order to build for Rio, Nash and Triano hope to involve young players early and get them used to spending their summers working with the national team. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Quoted

"I'm definitely committed. I have a lot to learn from these guys ... Being able to learn from them from now until it's time to play in the Olympics, I think I'll be ready by then."

Top prospect Tyler Ennis, who flew in from an elite high school basketball showcase in Los Angeles to take part on the last day of the camp

Bringing the best

It appears Canada may have turned a corner as far as getting its best players out.

- NBA regulars Joel Anthony and Tristan Thompson were among those taking part, along with up-and-comers Kris Joseph, Cory Joseph and Andrew Nicholson.
- Recent Los Angeles Lakers draft pick Robert Sacre was at the camp in Toronto along with former Gonzaga teammates Kevin Pangos and Kelly Olynyk.

Wozniak breezes into Round 2 of U.S. Open

Aleksandra Wozniak plays a backhand during Monday's match against Alexandra Cadantu in New York. GETTY IMAGES

A two-hour rain delay at the U.S. Open didn't throw Canada's Aleksandra Wozniak off her game.

Wozniak reached the second round of the Grand Slam with a 6-0, 6-3 win over Romania's Alexandra Cadantu on Monday.

The 48th-ranked Wozniak, a quarter-finalist last week in a Dallas tune-up event, needed little more than an hour to advance after losing four of her last five opening matches at Flushing Meadows.

The native of Blainville, Que., made it to the third round in 2009.

"Overall, it was the first solid match for me here," Wozniak said.

"She started putting more balls in during the second set. I'm glad I stayed on top of her and won this one. It was nice that it went so fast after the long rain delay."

Wozniak will next play good friend Lucie Safarova, who beat American Melanie Oudin 6-4, 6-0.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

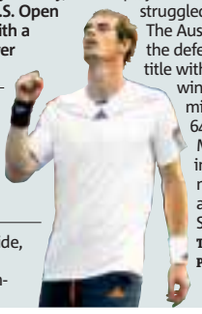
Quoted

"I'm looking forward to the second round. I'm really focused."

Aleksandra Wozniak

Elsewhere at Flushing Meadows

Seeking that elusive first Grand Slam title, Andy Murray, pictured, began his U.S. Open campaign Monday with a straight-set victory over Alex Bogomolov Jr.



- The Olympic gold medallist overcame early breaks in the first two sets of a 6-2, 6-4, 6-1 win.
- On the women's side, Samantha Stosur looked like a champion again, not the player who has often struggled this year.

The Australian began the defence of her Open title with a dominant win, needing 51 minutes to beat 64th-ranked Petra Martic 6-1, 6-1 in the tournament's first match at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

4 SPORTS

Mobile sports

The party appears over for talented young Dallas receiver Dez Bryant after a tumultuous summer. According to numerous reports, the Cowboys have set guidelines for Bryant to attend weekly counselling sessions, have a full-time security team and not be allowed to consume alcohol or attend strip clubs. Scan the code for the story.

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Horoscopes

♈ Aries
March 21 - April 20
Good intentions are not enough — you must live up to your ideals. Make it your aim today to treat everyone you meet, even strangers, in the same way as you treat those you love beyond question.

♉ Taurus
April 21 - May 21
There may be times when it seems as if you are losing control of everything in your life but it's not true, so steer clear of self-pity. Actually, things are progressing quite well for you at the moment.

♊ Gemini
May 22 - June 21
You may be tempted to try something outrageous today, something you believe will convince the doubters that you have what it takes. But what if it goes wrong? By all means, be bold but don't abandon common sense.

♋ Cancer
June 22 - July 23
With the travel area of your chart heavily emphasized, being on the move will be a lot of fun. But be aware that it will also have its dangers. Delays are going to happen whether you like it or not, so don't get angry.

♌ Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
Just because someone occupies a position of authority does not mean you can trust what they say. With communications planet Mercury under negative influences, a lot of what you hear is probably nonsense.

♍ Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Knowledge is power and the more you know about what others are up to, the better placed you will be to get something out of it. Are we talking blackmail here? Of course not, perish the thought!

♎ Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Take what even your friends tell you with a grain of salt. They may not lie to you on purpose but they are a bit confused about what's going on. You don't need advice. Your conscience will guide you.

♏ Scorpio
Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Focus only on things you understand. If you drift into areas where your knowledge is limited, you may fall foul of people who like to prey on trusting types like you. Be cautious. You don't have to prove yourself.

♐ Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Do not — repeat, not — sweep important topics under the rug. If you ignore them now, they will come back bigger and tougher to deal with later on. Don't worry about being unpopular. You've got issues to resolve.

♑ Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You may be a bit blunt in some of the things you say over the next 24 hours but that's OK. For too long certain people have been avoiding the realities of the current situation. It's time to get real.

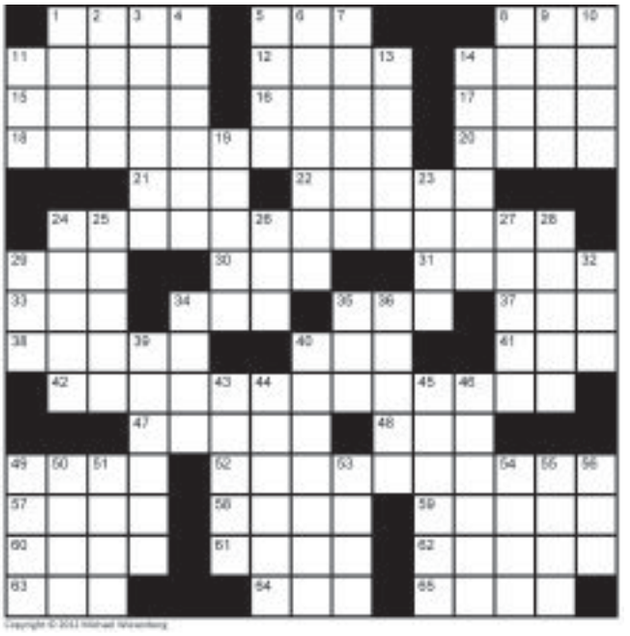
♒ Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Your mind will race off in all sorts of weird and wonderful directions today and it could be a lot of fun — but it could also be dangerous. Try not to make important decisions until after Friday's full moon.

♓ Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
Focus on your own needs and desires and pretend that other people don't exist. That might sound a bit selfish but you've done more than your share for the greater good of late. Look after Number One today.

SALLY BROMPTON

Crossword: Canadiana

BY MICHAEL WIESENBERG



Across
1. ___ Spumante: Italian sparkling wine
5. Emergency room drips, familiarly
8. "It's easy as ___"
11. Speck in the ocean
12. Broth
14. Clairvoyant one
15. Circus animals that balance balls
16. Gore Vidal's ___ *Breckenridge* (or the 1970 movie)
17. Pine case
18. Toronto team (2 wds.)
20. Dix, ___, douze
21. Corrida cheer
22. "Do you understand?" (2 wds.)
24. Alberta and Saskatchewan became part of this on Sept. 1, 1906
29. Angry crowd
30. Bad dog
31. American ___: Pacific Ocean territory
33. ___ mode: with ice cream (2 wds.)
34. That girl
35. Winnipeg's "Taking Care of Business" band, for short
37. Key beside F1
38. "The sky's the ___!"
40. Canadian map dispensers
41. Bring home after expenses
42. Formed in 1970, this world renowned chamber ensemble quintet always performs in formal black suits with white running shoes
47. Amino and folic
48. "...a feeling of sadness comes ___ me": Longfellow
49. Mounties, in short
52. Western capital (2 wds.)
57. Cleveland's state
58. Red-wrapped cheese
59. Kept the engine running
60. Toronto group that backed Bob Dylan as The Hawks; with "The"
61. Amusement park attraction
62. Bed boards
63. Versifier's "before"
64. Start of a countdown
65. Potato buds

Down
1. "... against ___ of troubles": Hamlet (2 wds.)
2. Certain hockey shot
3. Betray, kid-style (2 wds.)
4. In a class by ___
5. "Woe ___!": "Alas" (2 wds.)
6. First spacecraft to reach Uranus and Neptune
7. Beach habitué
8. Long, long time
9. Mercedes ___
10. Some of the original inhabitants of Ontario
11. Belief
13. Italian dish
14. Nova ___
19. Parasite
23. "Make ___!": Jean-Luc Picard (2 wds.)
24. Baby discomfort
25. Harper's US counterpart
26. Anticipated
27. Signs
28. Proboscises
29. ___ de mer: seasickness
32. "Just ___ naturally"
34. Opp. of legato in musical notation
35. Prohibition
36. Forbidden
39. As like as two peas ___ (3 wds.)
40. ___ Range: mountains that extend from California to southern BC
43. Frogman
44. "___ my way" (3 wds.)
45. Surface again
46. Drily
49. Choir attire
50. Blacken
51. It isn't yours
53. US Treasury Department agents, familiarly
54. Wings
55. Wagers
56. Audiophile's collection

Yesterday's Crossword

What's online

See today's answers at metronews.ca/answers.

Sudoku

How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic.

	8		4				5	
			2				7	8
		6	3		7	1	2	
	2	3						
4								5
						3	4	
	4	1	6		3	2		
7	6				9			
	5				1		8	

Yesterday's Sudoku

1	5	9	8	2	4	3	7	6
4	6	8	3	7	9	1	5	2
7	3	2	1	6	5	4	8	9
3	9	7	6	5	2	8	1	4
8	4	5	9	3	1	2	6	7
6	2	1	4	8	7	9	3	5
5	1	3	2	9	6	7	4	8
9	7	4	5	1	8	6	2	3
2	8	6	7	4	3	5	9	1

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